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THE MANUSCRIPT SOURCES FOR AMERICAN HISTORY.

BY HERBERT PUTNAM, LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS.

WITH reference to sources, the student of foreign history has heretofore been better situated than the student of American history. To a considerable extent, the material which concerns him has been centralized and systematized for his use, and placed under the conduct of experts; that which consists of archives,—that is, documents accumulated in actual administration, which record the transactions of government and are indispensable for the study of that part of history which is “past politics”—does, indeed, to a large extent, remain still with the department of the government whose operations created them or brought them together. But in certain countries the archives have been dissociated from such departments and centralized in a Record Office. The Record Office in London is, of course, the most prominent and the noblest example of intelligent effort in this direction; but most foreign countries can show some effort of a similar nature. Even Spain, supposed to be more fond of tradition than systematic in preserving and making available the evidence of it, has gathered at Simancas most of the archive material within reach of the government not already in safe custody at Madrid and Seville; and there, in a huge castle, remote from the perils of ordinary traffic and solid against assault by fire or time, preserves it for the use of the investigator. Of nearer fields of research we have examples on our borders: Mexico has its Record Office, seriously, courteously and hospitably administered, where are similarly preserved and made accessible the manuscript governmental records of its past, so far as these have survived revolution and earlier neglect; while Canada maintains both a Record Office and a trained archivist, who has not merely systematized and

made accessible the material at home, but has caused to be made and brought to Ottawa transcripts of documents in London which are important to the student of Canadian history.

The material in private hands has tended to drift into public libraries. In Great Britain, great masses of it still remain in private hands, but this has been brought to the surface by the British Government through its Historical Manuscripts Commission, which has compiled and published extensive indexes and calendars of the manuscript sources in private collections.

Again, the student of the history of a foreign country finds, if not all, certainly the main sources for his work within the confines of that country. There are notable exceptions. The attempt of the first Napoleon to centralize at Paris the archives of the regions subject to the imperial control, was only in part undone later; and an inestimable number of manuscripts still remain in the office of the French Government which the student would once have looked for at Madrid, at Rome, at Vienna, or in a dozen other centres of historic event. The student of the Elizabethan period may find most illuminating suggestion as to the England of that day in the reports made by the Venetian envoys to their home government. There is at Rome so much material important to the investigator in British history, that the British Government maintains there a permanent agent, whose duty is to search it out and report it. Original court records indispensable to the student of diplomacy were once "ambulatory": they followed various sovereigns in their migrations of policy or of conquest, and now rest far beyond the present limits of the regions which they concern. But, even making due allowance for such dispersion and eccentricity, the total area of the regions to be searched is comparatively small.

The student of American history has to meet a situation very different. For the Colonial period, and for certain relations of a generation succeeding it, his most important material is still abroad. He is separated from it, not by the English Channel and a slight expense, but by the Atlantic and a considerable expense. His national Government has as yet done nothing to bring it to him: the small amount thus far done,—the collection of a few fragments,—having been the praiseworthy but inadequate achievement of a few local authorities, societies or institutions. For the manuscript sources of American history in the possession of Gov-

ernment the investigator is dependent not upon one government, but on his national Government *plus* forty-five others,—very variant in the intelligence to comprehend his need, and in the desire and capacity to meet it.

The material for colonial history, so far as it exists in this country, is for the most part in a few libraries (such as the Lenox), in the custody of societies, or with the local governments that are the literary as well as the political successors of the colonies. That which is "archive" has to some extent been published by State or municipal authority. New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland have been especially zealous in such publication; but, of the thirteen original States, all but Delaware, Georgia and South Carolina have done something. North Carolina, whose early records are, for the most part, in London, has even caused transcripts of these to be made, deposited with its Secretary of State, and published. Where the public authorities have been inert, a local historical society has here and there undertaken the task—as in Delaware, where it has published the "Minutes of the Council of the Delaware State from 1776 to 1792." Even where the State has put into print all within its control, there has still been need of industry on the part of such societies, for a great mass of material properly "archive" is not with the State, but with them. It is indeed a whimsical, as well as inconvenient, circumstance that the sources for our history prior to 1790 should be so scattered, and to such a large extent in private collections. The court records of Barnstable County, Massachusetts, from 1663 to 1673, are in possession of the Historical Society of New Hampshire; the town papers of Dover, New Hampshire, 1693-1783, are in the State Library of New York, which contains also items as exotic as the early Court Register of Stafford County in Virginia, and the original Minutes for 1776-80 of the South Carolina Navy Board. Important early records of Virginia, including the Records of the Virginia Company itself, 1619-24, and the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Virginia Council from 1622 to 1627, came to the Library of Congress with the collection of President Jefferson. The official letter-books and official diary of Robert Morris, as Superintendent of Finance from 1781 to 1784, distinctly public records, were for thirty years in the possession of General Meredith Read (who

had bought them in a junk-shop), and were only three years ago acquired for the National Library from his widow. One would expect to find in the Navy Department the log-books of our naval officers; but in the earlier years it was the custom to consider these the private property of such officers, and many are now appearing in the market, as if ordinary private diaries. Those, for instance, of Commodore Preble were acquired by Government only within the past year, in the purchase of the Preble Papers by the Library of Congress.

These are but examples of a condition which, in 1900, led a committee of Congress to report that "hardly any State possesses at present complete files, either in manuscript or in print, of its own records. Some of the records appear never to have been systematically preserved. Some have been lost. Some are in the possession of other States or of the national Government. Large portions exist in manuscript only; while others, the originals of which have disappeared, are in printed volumes now scarce and virtually impossible of replacement."

For the post-Revolutionary periods the conditions have been little more satisfactory. The material is not, indeed, so much scattered; it is for the most part in this country; and it is chiefly in public offices. But it has been exploited to a very small extent. It has received far less attention from the historical societies, which, as Professor Jameson has remarked, "pay twice as much attention to the period of exploration and first settlement as to all the rest of the Seventeenth Century, twice as much to the period anterior to 1700 as to that from 1700 to 1775, and none whatever to that since the Revolution." Certain of the western States subsidize the researches and publications of historical societies, which, of course, deal with post-Revolutionary history. A few States—such as Iowa, Alabama and Mississippi—now maintain archivists, whose duty it is to seek everywhere the literary sources of their early history, and to bring to the State capitals the record of them in indexes, calendars or actual transcripts. But these undertakings are as yet sporadic.

As to the national archives, the committee of Congress, already quoted, reported that "at present no lawyer or historical student, desiring to consult the archives of the national Government, can feel in advance any assurance that the papers to which he wishes access are to be found in the place in Washington where they

would naturally be supposed to be, or even that they are actually in the possession of the United States at all. . . . Documents of the utmost legal importance, affecting personal and governmental interests of great magnitude, are scattered about among the executive Departments and Bureaus, and are often stored under conditions which not only make access to them difficult, but also open the way to the mutilation or loss of the documents themselves."

The report of this committee (the House Committee on the Library) accompanied and explained a bill, which called upon the American Historical Association to investigate the character and condition of the archives and public records of the several States and Territories, and of the United States, and to report to Congress results and recommendations. The bill did not pass. But the Association has proceeded without governmental aid, except in publication. It has maintained two commissions,—one (created in 1895) to investigate and exploit the manuscript sources in private hands, thus paralleling for the United States the work of the Historical Manuscripts Commission of Great Britain; the other, The Public Archives Commission (created in 1899), to report upon those in public offices, without, however, any design of publication. The work of these commissions has been purely voluntary, the subsidies granted by the Association being applied merely to clerical and incidental expenses. It has resulted in the publication in the annual reports of the Association of useful statements as to existing manuscript sources. These cover already the character, scope and condition of the public archives of twelve States, and of the cities of New York and Philadelphia, and the legislative journals of the several Colonial Assemblies; they include a convenient list of the items relating to American history in the private collections of Great Britain, drawn off from the reports of the English Historical Manuscripts Commission; and they have reproduced in full certain manuscript material—such as the Correspondence of Clark and Genet, and the Calhoun letters—not heretofore generally available.

Moreover, a recommendation of a committee of this Association has induced the Carnegie Institution to undertake a portion of the very investigation which had been the purpose of the proposed legislation by Congress. This is the examination of the public records of the national Government at Washington. A grant for

such an examination was the first grant made by the Institution in the interest of historical research. The investigation under it, begun in February of last year, has been completed; and the resultant report, shortly to be published, will contain the fullest statement, the most detailed and competent analysis, yet made as to the manuscript sources for history in the possession of the Government at Washington.

A further recommendation of this advisory committee has induced the authorities of the Carnegie Institution to establish at Washington an agency for the utilization of the manuscript sources there. It includes a Director of Historical Research, who, among other functions, is to aid investigators, including student workers, to a prompt and intelligent use of the historical material which the report reveals.

That a large part of this material is not at present either logically placed or most conveniently accessible, has been obvious enough. It is of three classes: official records necessary to present administration, archives proper, and historical manuscripts literary in character. It should be divided among the executive Departments, a Record Office and the National Library. But the United States Government has no Record Office; and until recently has had no National Library with accommodations appropriate to the custodianship of important manuscript material. As a result, not merely archives but historical manuscripts entirely unrelated to administration have been accumulated in the executive Departments. They have, indeed, accumulated in such an overwhelming mass as to impede and afflict administration, and induce incessant appeals to Congress for relief, through increased accommodations or the establishment of separate facilities for storage. These appeals have at last been successful, and an appropriation has been granted for the construction of a building to which the Departments may send such of their files as cannot longer be accommodated in their offices, and are yet of a value which should preclude their destruction. Whether this institution will expand into a Record Office is yet to be seen. A mere storage warehouse is *not* a Record Office. It may preserve; but, without expert service and a positive duty of research, it cannot make useful the material.

The material for which it will provide will, however, be archives proper; that is, the documents which have accumulated through

the direct operations of the Government.* From time to time, the Government has, however, come into the possession of historical manuscripts distinctly literary in character. Certain of these—such as the papers of the Marquis de Rochambeau, and those accumulated by Peter Force in the compilation of his archives—were deposited in the Library of Congress. Others went to executive Departments—especially the Department of State. But the conditions which directed them thither have ceased to exist. The Library of Congress is now the National Library, with a building both safe and ample, and with elaborate equipment for the care of manuscript material. It maintains a department specially and exclusively devoted to this, and under conduct of an expert of high repute as an authority in the sources of American history; and its duty is not merely to acquire and preserve these sources, but to make them useful. Accordingly, Congress has now enacted† that:

“The head of any executive Department or Bureau, or any commission of the Government, is hereby authorized from time to time to turn over to the Librarian of Congress, for the use of the Library of Congress, any books, maps or other material in the Library of the Department, Bureau or commission no longer needed for its use, and in the judgment of the Librarian of Congress appropriate to the uses of the Library of Congress.”

* For instance: the records of the Auditor for the Post-Office Department. They contain material for the history of our postal system from its beginnings. They should not be destroyed. But when the Department moved to its new building, five years ago, there was no space available for them, and the huge mass—12,000 volumes, weighing over a hundred tons—was actually without a home. They were offered to the Library of Congress, as a deposit. But an examination of them showed that, while material for an archive office, they were not material for a library. A third of them were later sent to a pulp-mill, and the remainder placed on temporary storage in a rented building. The original returns of the first Census were, a couple of years ago, ordered to be scattered among the several States, or, failing hospitality there, to be destroyed. The order was given by Congress under a misapprehension as to their value to the economist and the genealogist; and its operation was happily postponed, until now it may be averted; but the issue of it illustrates the peril to which original sources are subject in the absence of a Record Office and a responsible archivist. The files of Senate and House have been in constant peril—from heat, moisture, inability or indifference. Those of the House have indeed suffered from actual depredation. A large mass of them—some 6,000 volumes—were lately brought to the Library of Congress for temporary safety. Among them, in the general unappreciated mass, were the originals of Hamilton's great report upon Manufacture and that upon a National Bank, signed by him.

† In the appropriation act for the present year.

The first important transfer to be made under this act was embodied in the following executive order issued on March 9th, 1903:

"The historical archives in the Department of State, known as the Revolutionary archives, and comprising (1) the records and papers of the Continental Congress [307 vols.]; (2) the papers of George Washington [299 vols.]; (3) the papers of James Madison [75 vols.]; (4) the papers of Thomas Jefferson [137 vols.]; (5) the papers of Alexander Hamilton [65 vols.]; (6) the papers of James Monroe [22 vols.]; (7) the papers of Benjamin Franklin [32 vols.], are by authority provided by the act of Congress entitled 'An Act making appropriations for the legislative, executive and judicial expenses of the Government for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1904, and for other purposes,' approved February 25, 1903, hereby ordered to be transferred from the Department of State—with such exceptions and reservations, in each collection herein enumerated, as in the discretion of the Secretary of State may be required for the continuity and completeness of the records and archives of the Department of State—to the possession and custody of the Library of Congress, to be there preserved and rendered accessible for historical and other legitimate uses, under such rules and regulations as may from time to time be prescribed by the Librarian of Congress. . . . The transfer here directed shall be made on the 1st day of July, 1903, or as promptly thereafter as shall be found conveniently practicable to the Department of State and the Library of Congress.

"THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

"White House, March 9, 1903."

This transfer has required, of course, the cooperation of the authorities of the State Department, which has been entirely prompt and cordial. It assumes that papers of importance to the investigator in history, and not necessary for administrative purposes, will render a larger service to scholarship if in the Library, which has a specific duty not merely to preserve them, but to make them accessible, than in an Executive Department where this service is purely voluntary and is not sustained by specific appropriation. The principle is one that will doubtless apply generally. The transfer leaves the ownership, control and possession still with the Government. It merely utilizes, as custodian, a different Government agency now deemed more appropriate.

The historical manuscripts in which the Federal Government has title, and for whose preservation and utility it is responsible, are not limited to those in the Departments at Washington. Others have come to it with the acquisition of new territory,

others still through the operation of its customs system at various ports of entry. Among the former were the archives at Porto Rico, at Guam and in the Philippines. Those at San Juan were, by order of the War Department, brought to Washington and sorted over, and those deemed appropriate for preservation there were retained in the Library, the remainder being returned. The archives at Guam would naturally be of value as illustrating and epitomizing, in one secluded province, the course and method of Spanish colonial administration during several centuries. They had been reported to include three items of peculiar interest: the letter-books of the Spanish Governors, containing their correspondence with the Governor-General of the Philippines, to whose jurisdiction they became subject after the independence of Mexico; the Reports of the Residencias, or courts of inquiry, which were held at the end of the administration of every Governor; and the inventory of the effects of the Jesuits taken in great detail when they were expelled from the island. By order of the Navy Department, the extant records supposed to be of value have been shipped to Washington. They are comprised in a single case of much mutilated material. Accompanying it is a statement from the Governor of the Island, that "these records comprise everything here that could be saved, white ants having utterly destroyed the bulk of all old records." No such action has yet been taken with reference to the manuscript records in the Philippines, although considerations very similar would seem to apply to these—namely, that they are in peril from damp and from insects, and that, even with intelligent custodianship, if that can be afforded at Manila, they are remote from the centre where historical research is to be carried on, and from the other material indispensable to the study of colonial administration in a comparative way.

Of earlier acquisition are the Spanish and Mexican archives, which came to the Government with the cession of New Mexico and of California. The former were left at Santa Fé in the custody of the Territorial authorities; the latter have been and are now in the custody of the Government land office at San Francisco. Those at Santa Fé have been, during the past half century, victims of shocking neglect and maltreatment; some of them have been deliberately burned, others used as waste or wrapping paper, others freely purloined to serve the interest of individuals in the

prosecution of private claims. All have suffered from damp, from heat and from the ravages of insects. The remnant has been for some years in the technical custody of the Territorial librarian, in the actual keeping of the Secretary of State for the Territory. Of what it consists, how far of documents important to history, can be ascertained only by an examination by experts, which the Territorial authorities were in no position to undertake. The entire collection has now been brought to the Library of Congress, where this examination can be made and the results, if deemed of sufficient value, edited and published in indexes, calendars and abstracts, and where the repairs necessary to the preservation and use of the manuscripts can be arranged for.

A proposal to bring to Washington, for a like purpose, the archives at San Francisco met with a protest from resident societies and individuals in California, who, conceding the title to the documents and the authority over them to rest with the Federal Government, regard their present location as sufficiently safe, and their utility to investigators on the Pacific slope of greater concern than their possible utility to investigators at large.

In the course of the past fiscal year it was learned that Congress had authorized certain custom-houses* to destroy such of their records as were no longer necessary to the administration of the respective offices. Through the courtesy of the Secretary of the Treasury, a representative of the Library of Congress was permitted to make an examination of some of this material, in order to determine whether a part could not judiciously be preserved in the Library as a record of forms used in the past in conducting custom-house operations, and as matter indirectly throwing light upon the commercial methods employed in the earlier history of the nation. Much material of this description was found, and under the order of the Treasury Department it has been transferred to the Library.

In 1827, Edward Everett proposed that Congress should secure and deposit in the Library of Congress copies of all papers in the archives of Great Britain relating to American affairs. He was concerned that the student of our history and institutions should

* They were seventeen in number, and included ports so important as Boston, Salem, New York and Charleston. At New York alone, the records selected for destruction aggregated 200 tons, and dated back to 1790. They were sold as junk at so much per pound.

have to go abroad for the most important of his sources. Four generations have passed, and the student of to-day has still to go abroad for them. He has, indeed, the considerable number of documents reprinted or abstracted from the Record Office by Brodhead in New York, by the Pennsylvania History Society, or by other State authorities, societies or institutions — such as the Loyalist Papers in the New York Public Library, complementing certain originals in the Library of Congress. For the Revolutionary period, he has the excellent facsimiles published by Mr. Stevens. But the larger portion still requires a trip to London. Of the huge and indeterminate mass on the Continent he has as yet not even a precise description. For those in London, such a description and guide is now in prospect: it is at once to be undertaken under a grant from the Carnegie Institution, which is the third beneficent service of this Institution to historical research. One may hope that it will be followed by endeavors to secure accurate information as to what of importance exists at Paris, Versailles, Madrid, Seville, Simancas, Rome and other Continental centres. Such information will be in itself an invaluable aid to research, will promote many a useful investigation and preclude many a fruitless one; and it will doubtless result in the project which is of first concern to historical study in this country to-day, as it was in Mr. Everett's day: the acquisition of copies of numerous documents of which the originals must remain abroad, and the deposit of these at Washington, where they may be made accessible to investigators. Such copies, transcripts or facsimiles will certainly be made; perhaps they will be made by the National Library and the Carnegie Institution in cooperation, as has been proposed by the authorities of the Library. They can be made effectively, however, only after a precise statement by experts as to what exists, and only under a definite plan of procedure which also shall be based upon the judgment of experts.

Meantime, the Library of Congress has not ignored opportunities nearer at hand. It brought to its new building manuscript material that was of first importance, even though the material touched but fragments of our history. During the past six years, it has acquired certain considerable collections: the Preble papers, and the diary and letter-books of Robert Morris already mentioned; the papers of Salmon P. Chase—22 bound volumes and 6,300 letters, covering the period from 1824 to 1873; correspond-

ence of Daniel Webster, which comprises some 2,500 letters to and from him; letter-books and log-books of Commodores Barry and Porter; the Ellis papers—278 bound volumes and over 56,000 individual pieces, the complete office files of a great mercantile house at Richmond, Virginia, importers and exporters during the entire first half of the nineteenth century, invaluable to a student of economic history; and a multitude of non-related items.

It received, last spring, the noble gift of the Andrew Jackson papers, long in the possession of the family of Montgomery Blair. Within the past four months, it acquired by purchase the papers of President Polk, a collection which, among nearly 10,000 items, includes a multitude of political letters as yet unpublished; and still more recently it has had the gift from Mrs. Smith I. Van Buren, of the papers of President Van Buren. With the Washington, Madison, Jefferson and Monroe papers from the State Department, it will thus have advanced far towards a Presidential series. This transfer from the Department of State brings to it, indeed, nearly a thousand volumes which have constituted the most eminent manuscript material in the possession of our Government,—and a considerable section of which—the 307 volumes of the papers of the Continental Congress—has scarcely been explored.

We have, then, to-day various agencies cooperating with each other to bring about conditions more favorable to historical research in this country: A national association of historians, which influences local authorities to investigate the original sources in their possession, to safeguard them and to exploit them—which correlates the work of these local authorities, societies and institutions and supplements it by indexing, calendaring and editing; the Carnegie Institution, creating and maintaining an expert service for the investigation of sources and for guidance in their use; and the federal Government, which, as an efficient and generous publisher, has for years, without charge, put into print the reports of the Historical Association, its proceedings, its discussions and the material accumulated by its two Commissions, and which, through the National Library, desires to make fully and freely available, under expert conduct, the material for history in its possession, and to affiliate itself with every effort to bring within reach of the student of our history the other manuscript sources indispensable to his work.

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